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ABSTRACT

To learn more about small group interactions, a study investigated the characteristics of women's conversation in its own right rather than compared to a male model of conversation. The researcher spent 10 months as a participant/observer in a women's weekly circle (WWC), a group of mothers of young children who met once a week. The researcher focused on storytelling as a form of social interaction that would embody the communicative style and interactional norms of the group. Early sessions were transcribed from memory and later sessions from tape recordings. Impressions and interpretations of the group's interactions were verified through participant interviews at the end of the observation period. It was found that, unlike the typically competitive conversation of men, women's conversation was characterized by cooperation and support. Stories reflected vicarious as well as personal experiences and prototypical as well as specific events, and were told in order of occurrence or expanded from a kernel. Turn-by-turn talk was not suspended to permit story telling to take place in conversation. WWC members characteristically made linking remarks, thus facilitating the telling of stories, highlighting story connections within a series, and showing their connection to the ongoing stream of interaction. The sharing of common problems through storytelling was much more common than self-aggrandizement through tales of personal adventures and exploits. (HTH)

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THE STORY IS IN THE TELLING: A COOPERATIVE STYLE OF CONVERSATION AMONG WOMEN

by
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in
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Women's way of talking has often been compared to men's and found lacking. Women's speech has been characterized as weak, tentative, indirect, hypercorrect, overly qualified, and questioning in tone. In contrast, men's speech is seen as strong, assertive, direct, authoritative, and declarative in tone (Lakoff, 1975). This is a false comparison, however, because men's communicative style has been held up as the standard against which women's style has been evaluated. Scholars have not studied women's speech in terms of what they might learn about communication. My study was motivated by a desire to study women's speech in its own right and specifically to explore what we might learn about verbal interaction in small groups by studying the speech of women talking to women.

The focus of my study was storytelling in a women's rap group. I concentrated on this aspect of women's communication because in my experience storytelling is an important part of female to female communication. Women tell about their lives in stories. They also tell much about their lives in the way they tell stories and in

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the way they listen to each other. I was primarily interested in the way women told stories and the purposes these storytellings served in an ongoing group because these are the features of talk which reflect communicative style and the dynamics of female/female interaction in a group.

Design of Study

Participant/Observation

For ten months, I was a participant/observer in the Women's Weekly Circle (WWC), a group of mothers of young children who met once a week at a church in a midwestern college town (pop. 100,000) in the U.S.A. The church provided childcare facilities and a staff leader for the group. The members of the WWC were eleven white middle class women who were between the ages of 31 and 41. They were all married to men who worked at the local university as faculty or graduate students. They had all quit working full-time outside the home when they had their first child. Nine out of the eleven had two children ranging in age from one month to twelve years. In spite of their striking similarities, they saw themselves as a very diverse group in terms of interests, opinions, and personality.

I selected this group for study because I was interested in observing a women's group whose primary purpose was to talk about their lives or whatever else interested them, but who were not engaged in any other co-ordinated task. I felt this context would yield the most storytelling examples and would be the closest I could come to a natural friendship group. An informal group of women friends would have been more difficult to monitor and might have been more affected by my own selection processes.

A group of young mothers seemed an appropriate choice because during the years of early motherhood women often form informal networks and groups to share family responsibilities and provide emotional support for what has been a traditially female experience--the primary care of young children. If there are differences between men's and women's groups, it is here that they might be most obvious.

The talk of young mothers has often been disparaged as trivial because it is assumed to be about young children and, therefore, not important. I have not, however, found any studies which have actually analyzed the talk of young mothers. Once again it seems that men assume they know what women are talking about and that it is not important. My own experience and a few studies, such as Aries, 1976, indicate that women communicate differently among themselves than in mixed sex groups. I wanted to study women's speech among themselves rather than in response to men. Would a group of women exhibit a "feminine style" of speaking among each other and what meaning would this style of interaction have for them? That is, would the same features of talk mean the same thing or be used in the same way in mixed and same sex groups. In order to address these questions, I focused on storytelling as a form of social interaction which would embody the communicative style and interactional norms of the group.

From October 22, 1979 to July 30, 1980, I attended 33 sessions of the group which included Monday morning meetings at the church from 9:30-11 am, monthly pot luck dinners held in members' homes and occasional luncheons or breakfasts in local restaurants. As a participant/observer, I took an active role as a member of the group although I was not a young mother. This seemed to be the best way not to disturb the ecology of the group. To

have been only an observer would have seemed an obvious intrusion into a small social group. Members might have felt as if they were being watched and have become self-conscious. As a consequence, I did not take notes during the meetings but reconstructed as much of the interaction as I could recall on the same day. I recorded the topics of conversation and any storytellings which I recalled. I included my subjective impressions of the particpation of each woman. I frequently talked to the staff leader after sessions and also took notes on these conversations. The purpose of my participant/observation was to provide a context for analyzing storytelling in the WWC in terms of the group's dynamics. The ethnographic approach implies that the researcher understands the behavior of participants in their own terms or from their perspective.

Tape Recordings

After spending three months with the WWC, I tape recorded sessions for a five-month period, accumulating 27 hours of taped conversations. The first eight sessions recorded (between December 17 and March 17), were selected for intensive study because they were representative of the kinds of group meetings the WWC had and because they occurred before I began other interventions which might have affected interaction in the group. Each tape was listened to several times while notes were taken identifying the storytellings and describing the interactions. Then segments of talk identified as storytellings were transcribed and subjected to a detailed analysis of their form. I was interested in finding out how they told

stories (structural features) and why they told the stories they did (functional aspects).

In order to gather my data on storytelling from the tapes, I had to formulate a definition of storytelling and verify my means of selecting segments of talk as storytellings. To test my selection process I asked each member of the WWC and an equal number of people outside the group to listen to 45 minutes (one side) of a taped group session and indicate the first and last lines of the stories they heard, the topic of the story, and the teller (if they were a member of the group). Results indicated strong agreement between the WWC, the outside group, and myself as to the number of stories counted (mean of 10.7 and 9 respectively and 9 for me) and the segments of talk selected as storytellings. Four segments of talk were picked almost unanimously as storytellings (all WWC respondents and I identified these stories as did five out of the seven outside evaluators). After examining what these four stories had in common as compared to other segments of talk which were less consistently identified as storytellings, I developed a workable definition of storytelling. Storytelling is the recounting of a series of connected events which has a point or significance for the narrator/character in the story. I identified 55 storytellings in the eight sessions I studied and transcribed 38 of these for detailed analysis of the organizational features.

Interventions

At the end of my period of observation and recording of the group, individual interviews were conducted with each member. Interviews focused

on the members' history in the group and their impressions of the group. One session of the group was devoted to talking about the group's process. One other intervention was undertaken. A transcript of an episode of talk was given to each member who was asked to indicate what she recalled thinking at the time the talk was going on. This annotated transcript was used to indicate the relationship between what members said in the group versus what they reported they were thinking. Thus, in these ways I endeavored to verify and cross check my impressions and interpretations of talk and interaction in the WWC.

Findings

The meaning of cooperative and supportive in the context of this group is revealed in the structural or organizational features of storytelling in conversation. Other groups would reveal different patterns of storytelling as indicative of their members' interrelationships and interactions. I have summarized my findings by presenting the key features of interaction in the group, the key features of storytelling, and the way in which these features are related. I have selected one of the stories told in the WWC to illustrate the interrelationship of these features.

An Example of Storytelling in the WWC

"Leaving Baby at Home" (#7) is representative of the WWC in several ways. First, it is the story of a mother of a young child, and, thus, is representative of the WWC members' concerns. Second, it is a funny story a woman tells on herself. This was common among first person narratives in this group. Third, the way the story is introduced with a question and the subsequent discussion after the telling demonstrates the way group members interacted with each other. Members were very responsive to each other's storytelling and one story was often followed by another or a segment of a story which supported the point of the preceding one.

The following story occurred on January 21, 1980 during a playful discussion about test anxiety which was occasioned by the taking of a quiz about older people.

LEAVING BABY AT HOME (#7, Leslie)

Leslie: Do you still have weird dreams about school? and// (---)

Lee, Jenny and ?: Yes!

Leslie: This one that I had last week it's so horrible. ((Kay and June are engaged in a quiet subconversation, but on my tape this one is clearly heard over it.)) I was at school, I was in college and everything but I was married and had a child and I lived where I live but I was in school. And I was at school and I thought to myself what about Brian ((her son)) you know just in the dream I thought he was at home and he was by himself and I had forgotten him

and he was just there by himself and I thought, I gotta get home ((said in a breathy voice)) and I was sitting there in the class and I thought Sam's ((her husband)) not there I didn't even ask him to take care of him. Brian's at home by himself, so I go racing down the street trying to get home. Then I found a quarter on the sidewalk for the laundry ((laughter by Lee and others)), (---) I can't even stop to pick that up I have to go racing home

Connie: Oh no

Leslie: and find out what's the matter with Brian ((pause and laughter)) But I lived in the same house and// everything.

Paula: That's really updating your dream isn't it?

Leslie: ((recapping dream for those who weren't listening))

:

((test anxiety kernel which follows up story))

Leslie: I've never dreamt with Brian but I've always had those dreams where you show up for a test and you realize you never came// to any of the classes ((kernel jointly developed))

Lee: yes!

((much laughter after this.))

Kay and Lee: That's the one I always have. That's mine. ((laughter and agreement))

Leslie: It's the final// and you never came to one class ((overlapping talk agreeing and saying similar things))

Connie: Oh it's so scary.

Leslie: And you can't find the classroom.//

Lee: Yes, that's the one. And you realize that//

Leslie: And you know you've been there all semester and you can't find the room.

Lee: You've forgotten to go all semester.

Kay: We shouldn't have passed out those quizzes ((all laughing))

Patterns of Talk in the WWC

The WWC exhibited patterns of talk previously reported in the literature as characteristic of women's conversation in the same and mixed sex groups. Women are likely to do more of the interactional work in conversation of making connections between what different speakers say, giving minimal responses to encourage speakers to continue, paying attention to others and picking up on what they say, and asking questions and offering follow-up remarks (Edelsky, 1982; Fishman, 1978; Kalcik, 1975; Tromel-Plotz, 1982; and Zimmerman and West, 1977). Edelsky, Fishman, Kalcik, Tromel-Plotz, Zimmerman and West and others have all noted women's tendency to make connections in conversation and each have coined different terms for this activity including "joining," "hitching on," "tying together," and making "linking remarks." Women do interrupt each other but their interruptions or overlaps tend to be supportive, i.e., they do not change the topic of conversation, and the next speaker is the speaker who was interrupted (Kalcik, 1975). Women are more likely to make sure that everyone has a chance to speak, rotate leadership and avoid direct conflict (Kalcik, Fishman). For them, conversation is a cooperative effort.

In contrast, men are more likely to interrupt other speakers, especially women. They tend to control the topic of conversation in mixed sex

groups, to compete for turns at talk, to offer no acknowledgement of the comments of others, and to make more declarative statements (Maltz and Borker, 1982). For men conversation is often a form of competition. This is not to say that women do not compete with each other in conversation but that such competition is not overtly expressed because it would contradict their cooperative style of speaking.

In addition to these characteristics which have been reflected in other women's groups that have been studied, there were particular features of the WWC which contributed to their style of storytelling: regularity, similarity, longevity or stability, and the need for talk for talk's sake. The group met every week so that from week to week members would ask each other for updates on events in progress in their lives, such as job interviews or problems with a child. This became an important factor in the way stories were introduced in conversation. Although members saw themselves as different from each other, they had a common bond as mothers at home raising young children. This was an important factor in the content of their stories and their perceived need for the group. The WWC members had a particular need for talk for talk's sake because they were socially isolated. They especially wanted to talk to other young mothers who shared their social reality, which was invisible or of no interest to others. Women in the past, and in other contemporary contexts, have had naturally occurring groups to meet this need, such as extended families, neighbors, and local communities. WWC members saw themselves as lacking these kinds of networks or relationships and saw the WWC as a substitute for them. Finally, the longevity and stability of the group was enhanced by its location in a church which provided childcare facilities and a staff leader. This gave the group

some structure, legitimacy and resources which helped to maintain the group.

On the basis of previous research on women in groups and my study of the interaction and storytelling in the WWC, I concluded that the interaction in the WWC facilitated a cooperative style of storytelling as demonstrated by the organization, content, and point of view from which the stories were told. This style of storytelling reflects the strategic use of storytelling in the WWC to serve the primary function of providing support to group members as young mothers.

Organization of Storytellings

The most outstanding feature of storytelling organization in the WWC was that there was an open invitation to tell stories in the group. As one group member, Jenny, said, that was really what the group was for--to tell about our lives. This can be seen in the way stories were begun, developed and concluded.

Introductions. In order to tell a story a narrator must gain the attention of her or his audience for more than one turn-at-talk. This involves the cooperation of story recipients who must agree to listen to this longer stretch of talk. Story introductions serve the functions of requesting conversational space to tell a story, beginning the story, and tieing it to previous talk. Introductions may be very brief or more elaborated involving a speaker exchange between the prospective narrator and potential listeners (Jefferson, 1978). Members of the WWC did not have to work at getting the group to listen to their stories. They were often

invited to tell stories by the questions others asked. Storytellings typically lacked presequences which means that narrators did not have to offer to tell a story and wait for the offer to be accepted. Thus, the preface and the beginnings of the telling occurred in the same turn. This structural feature of story introductions reflects the nature of interaction in the WWC.

WWC members did not have to ask permission to tell their stories because they knew their stories were welcome by the questions that were asked and the way possible story introductions were picked up and encouraged. Storytellers in the WWC did not have to ask permission to tell a story because it was unnecessary for the structure and content of the ongoing interaction. Prefaces preceding stories in the WWC were jointly-developed story introductions involving the narrator and story recipients.

This conclusion is supported by ethnographic information about the group. One of the characteristics of the WWC which was often commented on was the interest members showed in hearing about each other's lives. Jenny commented that from week to week people would ask questions related to members' current concerns to follow up on what they had talked about last week. As she put it, "there's a thread through your life" that the group followed in the discussion from week to week. She said: "And you always come and you always pick up on somebody's life, you know and what more important is there than that? I think is to follow some thread like that you know and make some continuity." All the sessions together, then, were an ongoing saga of the members' lives and each week was a new installment.

Development. Not much attention has been paid to the types of stories which may be told in conversation. Definitions of storytelling and narrative

have tended to restrict the domain of what is and what is not considered a story without examining conversation for all the possible types of stories which might be told. It is from the limitations and a few distinctions made by others that I have devised three dimensions along which storytellings might be classified or characterized: the order of events, who was involved in the events, and when the events occurred.

The order of events in a story is determined by the narrator in conjunction with her/his audience and this order evolves in the process of telling. I agree with Stahl (1975) that events are often simultaneous and it is our telling which orders them. Sequencing, however, has been considered a crucial, if not defining, characteristic of storytelling. Kalcik (1975) identified "kernel stories" as characteristic of the feminist consciousness raising groups she studied. These stories began with a kernel which she defined as "a brief reference to the subject, the central action, or an important piece of dialogue from a longer story" (p. 7). The kernel may reveal the most important part of a story first, instead of leading up to it. A kernel may be expanded into a kernel story depending on the response of potential story recipients. The audience may contribute to the order in which the story is told by questions asked and comments made. This story form would seem to contrast with Labov's (1972) definition of narrative which depends on a story being told in the order of occurrence of actual events.

I was able to identify some of the stories in my sample as being kernel stories (20 out of 57) and some as being told in more or less chronological order. These two types of sequencing had consequences for the amount of joint participation, particularly in the introduction and

recounting sequences: kernel stories were characterized by a higher degree of joint participation. The important point, however, is that narrative events may be organized in many ways and need not follow a presumed chronology of external events to be heard as a storytelling.

The other dimensions along which storytellings might be characterized are also attempts to break out of preconceived notions. Must all stories be about the narrator's personal experience or can they be about vicarious experience? In the WWC, stories in which the narrator was not a character occurred quite frequently (26 out of 57 stories). Thus, the narrator need not be involved in the events she tells about. In addition, I found stories which were about prototypical rather than specific events. That is, events that happened more than once, such as Pat's story about what always seemed to happen at dinner with her husband and the kids. Thus, events told about may be in the past or recurring.

Although the telling sequences of a storytelling constitute the phase which invites the least participation, WWC members contributed to each other's storytelling by showing interest, asking questions, filling in aspects of the story or adding commentary, and tying points together. During telling sequences they also offered minimal responses, such as "umhum," "right," "oh," to show they were listening, understood the speaker, and often agreed with her. How a teller told a story and how the story was received are clearly interrelated and affected each other. Story recipients in the WWC were willing to receive storytellings and to participate in them. Thus, narrators were more likely to tell stories which encouraged and maximized this participation. In other contexts, different kinds of storytelling might be encouraged by the narrators and story recipients.

Conclusions. Narrators did not have to work at resuming turn-by-turn talk. Story recipients quickly picked up conversations by asking questions, offering comments, etc. Women's tendency to make linking remarks in conversation is crucial in connecting stories to the ongoing conversation and may have contributed to the ease with which storytellings were linked with each other in a series and were connected to ongoing talk.

These findings led me to question the idea that turn-by-turn talk was necessarily suspended when a story was told. If story recipients were free to take turns at talk during a storytelling, how were they able to do this without disrupting the storytelling or signaling the resumption of turn-by-turn talk? Edelsky's (1982) concepts of "floor" and "turn" proved useful in this regard. During a storytelling, the narrator has the floor. Story recipients may take turns at talk but the narrator retains the floor until the story is completed. Thus, a prospective narrator does not have to suspend turn-by-turn talk to tell a story but she does have to gain the floor. In the WWC, it was not difficult to gain the floor to tell a story. Because of the story recipients' active participation during the telling of a story, it was not difficult to resume turn-by-turn talk because it was never really suspended. Storytellings in other contexts would still require the narrator to gain the floor, but in cases where there was less recipient participation or the participation was more competitive, turn and floor might be more closely aligned. For example, turns during a telling might be discouraged as interruptive and perceived as challenges to the floor, rather than supportive additions.

Maltz and Borker (1982) has hypothesized that women may have a different turn taking system than men which is not as competitive. That

is, a female speaker does not have to win a turn at talk or compete with other female speakers to the same extent to gain the floor. Among women, a speaker knows she will get her chance to speak now or later and will even be encouraged to do so. Therefore, gaining the floor is not as great an issue among women speakers as it can be in mixed or all male groups.

Series of Stories. One story tends to lead to another in conversation creating a series of stories (Ryave, 1978). A series of stories may serve competitive or cooperative ends in a group. Competition in storytelling is characterized by topping or telling a better story than the last one and is primarily self-aggrandizing. Aries' (1976) study offers some evidence to indicate that members of men's groups may be more prone to tell stories about their accomplishments. In such a situation, a series of stories emerges spontaneously in a group. Each person tells a story in succession, but participants do not contribute to each other's stories. One story is completed before the next one begins. They are tied together by some theme or topic, but they are clearly separate productions. Stories in the competitive mode may be used to put someone down, to top a previous story or to contradict a previous story. By definition such stories are not aimed at support.

In contrast, cooperative storytelling involves showing support by sharing similar experiences which are not usually of a self-aggrandizing nature. This second mode of storytelling was characteristic of the WWC, while the first mode was noticeably absent. In the 14 series of stories consisting of a total of 38 stories, only two cases provide instances wherein a subsequent story was used to challenge the point of a preceding story. Stories in a series were most often used to support

points made by other narrators (10), or to support points made by the same narrator (5). In a few cases the stories were associationally related (4) by the same narrator or two different narrators. Generally, members affirmed the narrator's interpretation of her experiences with stories of similar experience. Members were assured that the difficulties they faced were not unique and could be overcome or at least lived through.

Why Do They Tell the Stories They Do?

The cooperative style of storytelling in the WWC is demonstrated not only by how they tell stories (organizational features), but why they tell the stories they do (point of view and function). Point of view has been considered extensively in the study of written narratives, but has not been dealt with in studying narratives in conversation. Consideration of functional features of personal experience storytelling has been limited.

Narration. The narration reveals the point of view from which the story is told and the relationship of the narrator to the story. This in turn reflects the relationship of the narrator to story recipients, just as it was revealed in the types of stories told and the ways in which they were organized. Most of the literature on stories in conversation does not consider the role the narrator plays in the story (protagonist, minor character, no character) and whether the story is told in the first, second or third person. Those who have looked at the role of the narrator in the story have assumed that in most personal experience narratives the narrator would be the central character. In the WWC, however, two-thirds of stories were told with the narrator as a minor character or no character in the

story. How is this finding to be interpreted? Does it indicate that the WWC members (and women in general) have low self-esteem or weak egos, so that even among themselves they do not tell stories in which they are the central characters? By looking at the nature of the group members' interactions and relationships, however, a different conclusion can be drawn.

In narrative prose, choice of narrator determines the point of view from which a story is told. A first person narrator who is a minor character has the advantage of the eyewitness view, but lacks the subjectivity of the first person protagonist narrator (Maclay & Sloan, 1972). This mode of narration may have been favored in the group because it was a way of sharing experiences which avoided direct confrontations. Personal experience stories with narrator as protagonist might have revealed more of the differences between members which could have led to conflict. By being a minor or no character in the story, narrators shared their experience in a way that may have invited more participation and promoted group solidarity in contrast to self-focused narratives which are more individualized in the telling. In addition, more self-aggrandizing stories may accentuate the differences between people, rather than emphasizing their similarities.

To explore the hypothesis that the narrator's casting of self as a minor character or no character reflected a desire to reduce potential conflict or disagreement and promote group solidarity, three factors were considered: 1) Was the content of these stories more controversial or of a more serious nature? Shifting the role of the narrator in the story may have been one way to create distance in talking about sensitive issues. 2) Was there more joint participation in these stories? If so, such stories might be said to invite others to join in the storytelling. 3) Were more

series of stories triggered by these stories? Does one story of this type more easily lead to another of any type?

Only the first question led to the discovery of a significant pattern. The amount of participation in storytelling did not differ by narrative role. Nor were there enough sets of serial stories to draw any firm conclusions, although there was a difference in the predicted direction. The proportion of serious to funny stories in relation to the role of the narrator, however, was clearly different. The proportion of serious to funny stories goes up as the narrator's distance from the story increases. Of the stories in which the narrator was not a character in the story, 24% (4 out of 15) were funny or had humorous elements, as compared to 60% (14 out of 23) of the minor character narratives and 80% (14 out of 17) of the narratives in which the narrator was the protagonist. WWC members seemed to tell funny stories about themselves and more serious stories about others.

It is likely that the role of the narrator in the story reflected the cooperative nature of storytelling in the WWC. Telling personal experience stories which focus on humourous treatment of common problems and experiences implies a shared perspective and common values from which the laughter derives. Such tales are not self-aggrandizing and build group solidarity. Generally, stories about others may be more common in conversation and reflect the particular interests of the WWC members in other people, as well as being an indirect means of expression. In any case, it is clear that the role of the narrator in the story is closely related to the functions of storytelling in conversation and their strategic use.

The Functions of Storytelling in the Women's Weekly Circle. The style of storytelling in the WWC--i.e., those common characteristics which I have identified--reflects strategic choices of narrators or participants. Thus, the functions such a style of storytelling may serve must be considered. In discussing organizational features, content and point of view, some possible functions have already been considered. The question then becomes what kind of picture of storytelling in the WWC emerges and what is behind that picture? What significance did storytelling have in the WWC?

The literature on storytelling seems to assume that in most personal experience stories the narrator is the protagonist and the purpose of the storytelling is self-aggrandizement. In the WWC, however, this did not seem to be the primary intent of the narrators. Only three of the storytellings (all narrator as protagonist stories) in the sample of 55 stories told in the WWC were self-aggrandizing in the sense of being success stories or stories of the narrator's accomplishments, exploits or adventures. The rest of the narrator as protagonist stories seemed to be stories that the narrators told on themselves--stories that revolved around embarrassing moments or problematic acts (see, for example, "Leaving Baby at Home", #7).

Watson and Potter (1962) described the two primary functions of sociability as presentation of self and sharing of self. These concepts can be applied to storytelling as a form of social interaction. The self-aggrandizing function of narratives corresponds to presentation of self. In the WWC, the sharing of self seemed more crucial. Sharing of self versus presenting may be more characteristic of women in groups. In addition in this particular women's group, members needed to affirm a

positive identity as young mothers and to construct a shared social reality of their lives. As Leslie said, who else is going to praise you for being a mother? Your children certainly do not. Storytelling is an important form of sociability because it allows the narrator to control or capture her experience by interpreting it and giving it meaning in the form of a story. It is also important because this interpretation can then be confirmed or questioned by those to whom the story is told. Stories are carefully selected for their audience to avoid discomformation. In the WWC, members had an opportunity to tell stories which they might not have told elsewhere because their tellings would not have been appreciated in the same way. As Jenny said, this is what this group is for--to tell about our lives and to break down the isolation of being a young mother at home with small children. Sharing obviously does this more than presenting.

Summary and Conclusions

Based on the study of storytelling in the WWC, several aspects of our current definitions of storytelling and its communicative functions need to be revised and expanded: 1) There are more types of storytellings in conversation than have been previously identified. Stories may be about vicarious as well as personal experiences, they may be about prototypical as well as specific events, and they may be told in order of occurrence or expanded from a kernel. 2) More attention needs to be directed toward the role of the narrator in the story, how this reflects the point of view from which the story is told, and how the choice of narrative role may be influenced by the nature of the interaction in a group and the relationships

among group members. 3) Turn-by-turn talk need not be suspended in order for a storytelling to take place in conversation. The narrator, however, does need to have the floor. The way stories were told in the WWC supports the hypothesis that women have a cooperative system of turn taking which differs from our current model of competitive turn taking. Current models may reflect the interaction style of men more than women and should be revised or selectively applied. The idea of alternate models of turn taking deserves further exploration. 4) Remarks which link the story to ongoing talk are crucial to the introduction and conclusion of a storytelling. WWC members characteristically made linking remarks and thus facilitated the telling of stories, their connection in a series, and their connection to the ongoing stream of interaction. This characteristic seems to be more common among women than men in same and mixed sex groups. It may contribute to a different style of storytelling for women and men. 5) The functions of storytelling in conversation vary depending on the nature of interaction in the group. In the WWC, sharing of common problems through storytelling was much more common than presentation of self through self-aggrandizing tales of the narrator's adventures and exploits.

This study indicates the importance of studying communication among women as a way of developing comprehensive models of communicative behavior. The characteristics of storytelling and interaction identified in the WWC may be characteristic of female groups in general and may be indicative of a more cooperative style of communication learned among women as compared to a more competitive style of communication among men.

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